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ABSTRACT

The history of a higher education demand assessment program in Manitoba is outlined, beginning with a sharp dip in enrollment in 1970. A three-year project was begun with three snapshot surveys of grade 12 decision-making in February, May, and June. The second year involved two snapshots, and the third used only one. During this time, attitudes toward this demand assessment approach improved considerably, and regional attention was gained. It was decided that an early warning system was needed to monitor shifting demands three years or more ahead of time. Additional areas of change and potential impact were identified: (1) recognition of the outcome orientation (jobs and careers) of students; (2) changes in the secondary education system that may affect postsecondary education; (3) financial situations of students; (4) educational technology and new delivery methods; (5) the need for comprehensive rather than isolated planning; and (6) contingency planning needs. Funding was obtained for a three-year planning model to begin in March 1976. The need to involve students, parents, and participants, other than the usual administrators in planning was emphasized. (MSE)

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THREE YEARS INTO THE FUTURE AND BEYOND

INTRODUCTION

A short time ago, January 28, 1976 to be exact, I attended an international "Conference on College and University Planning" held at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland. From the Conferences' impressive array of speakers, there emerged a number of common experiences and highly repetitive impact events worthy of a few moments' reflection.

Perhaps the most common experience for North American colleges and universities had been the assumption of the continuation of the growth of the 1960's and their lack of preparations when this bubble burst in the 1970's.

Yet this was 1976, and the bubble had destroyed their plans and expectations years earlier in the 1970-71 and 1971-72 period. Why was it taking our Post-Secondary institutions so long to pick up the pieces and get about the job of setting new goals and plans?

John Hopkins' President, Steven Muller, had one answer for assembled representatives when he described the typical Administrative leadership as comprised of those who either assumed growth and eventually got it to cover up their miscalculations, or those who achieved what could be accomplished as the shifts and trends provided limited opportunities to react and adjust.

Dr. Ben Lawrence, Director of the National Center for Higher Educational Management Systems summarized the situation in Post-Secondary administration as "We have all become the victims of the unexpected" and the unexpected, in combination with inflation, unionism and new national and provincial fiscal priorities have forced us into a continuum of short term crises.

What have we learned from this common experience? The speakers pointed to the following paths for the future:

Plans without regard for alternative possibilities in the future are no longer acceptable.

A single plan without contingency or option alternatives is a poor plan.

Early warning systems are required to assess future, not past, student demands.

Scenarios are needed to describe highly probabilistic futures and these in turn must be monitored and reported in on-going updates of plans.

The relevance of our topic today, Three Years Into the Future and Beyond with a Post-Secondary Demand and Enrolment Approach, is found in its response and support of the paths that must be followed by future planners. Before embarking on an exploration of our topic, a philosophical question emerged from the Baltimore Conference worthy of our consideration.

What is Planning?

Unanimously, speakers and institutional representatives at the Conference rejected traditional forecasting of the 1960's as a satisfactory approach. On the other hand, some confusion existed as to the status of contingency or alternative option planning, future demand assessment, highly probabilistic futures, scenarios, manpower planning, budgetary-inflationary ceilings, etc. One definition of planning in an "open society" did receive modest support. It was:

Planning should involve one or more of the above approaches, but even more important than the approach, the size of the data banks or the model of the computers utilized, planning is a human process which should involve the participation of those who must live with, and tolerate if not support, these plans.

With reference to this human process and participation definition of planning, we observe again the phenomenon surrounding the bursting of our growth bubble at the end of the 1960's. In most, if not all regions, the size of the high school graduating classes continued to increase several years after enrolment expectations burst. In effect, our youth and their parents had not been drawn into the planning process, but had clearly changed their values and resultant Post-Secondary choices. As a result, all the plans of Mice and Men, as the quotation goes, went astray.

The moral of our story might be that, while college and university decision-makers, planners, professors and support staff may disregard the future demands of students and their parents, their failure to involve these participants in the planning process can have disastrous consequences.

What's It All About?

In origin, its about the Fall of 1970 and a sharp dip in the rate of increase in post-secondary enrolments in Manitoba, and the repetitive bubble bursting we had earlier observed across North America. The difference in Manitoba, however, was the Universities Grants Commission did not sit there and go down the drain with the unfortunate budgetary and planning ramification of the unexpected. The Commission began exploring alternative approaches. At this point, I enter the picture as a Research Associate from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education with the conceptual framework for a decision-making approach to demand assessment.

The saga of PDEM-I and II now begins to unfold and, as in all good sagas about the introduction of an innovation, there were obstacles, frustrations, disappointments and disbelief surrounding this project. The first years' effort, for example, was to be guided by a joint university committee; however, the discord, the disbelief and the lack of support evidenced at the first meeting of this Committee resulted in its never meeting again. The first years' effort was mounted and directed from my office with contracting out activities for surveying and model development going to two researchers, Drs. Dale Beckman and Tom Major of the Faculty of Administrative Studies, University of Manitoba. Co-operation for implementation was given by the Department of Education, the Secondary System and school superintendents, principals and counsellors.

Year one of the three year demand assessment project involved three snapshot surveys of grade twelve decision-making during February, May and June. Once the actual outcomes became available to compare with

the forecast, a one-to-one follow-up validation was undertaken to determine if the significant factors in the decision-making process had been correctly identified and weighted.

Year two was undertaken with increased confidence in the methodology and the number and timing of snapshots, changed to December and May.

Year three's forecast took the final step out in time with a single snapshot taken in mid-October, 1973, and the forecast presented on December 1st for budgetary consideration. Then began the long wait to see if the September, 1974 enrolment outcomes would support such a jump in time. At last, the wait ended. Forecasts were supported by the actual enrolment target.

Outcomes for the project were recorded in the minutes of the Universities Grants Commission in the Fall of 1971, before the project was undertaken. The acceptable target error was two percentage points at the total systems level, with internal consistency at the institutional, faculty and program levels. Each one of the forecasts for year one, two and three, were within target error, and an average for the three years, the error was around the one percentage level with the range being +.2, -.86, +1.4%. Findings suggest that, when all three snapshots are used, first year enrolment in larger faculties and programs can be forecast with almost exacting accuracy. For example, first year Arts had an error of two students and science had no error (even the researchers warn that this level of accuracy was beyond their wildest expectations and contained more than a little luck). With the single snapshot error levels in large first year programs appear around the four percentage point level.

During the three years' research, development, operational application and successful forecasting, the climate towards this approach began to change. At the end of year one, the Community Colleges and their division asked to become part of the project. The Student Aid and Youth Secretariat joined shortly thereafter. The universities indicated renewed interest, and an official committee called the Post-Secondary Research Reference Committee of Manitoba was constituted under the author's chairmanship. A year later, the Committee was re-constituted with senior representation and expanded to include membership for the Department of Education and a Co-Chairmanship for the Community Colleges.

With the passage of time, the approach gained regional attention and has been undertaken, in part, by the Provinces of Saskatchewan and British Columbia. At the national level, Statistics Canada utilized some elements in one of its national surveys. Inquiries, visits and presentations have also extended to the international post-secondary sector.

The original project also became the basis for a number of spin-off projects, institutional and agency adjustments and a proliferation of reports. It was obviously time for a moratorium, to re-think where we are, current objectives and options and alternatives for the future.

A one year evaluation was agreed upon to explore the existing models in detail, and to go beyond the Manitoba efforts to the national and international arena of Post-Secondary research and development in the search for alternatives. This effort culminated in a Conference on "Assessing Demand for Post-Secondary Education in Western Canada", attended by representatives and observers from the four western provinces and documented in the conference report (of the same name) by Dr. J.A. Riffel, Chairman of the the Department of Educational Administration,

University of Manitoba.

Conclusions drawn from this Conference might be summarized as follows:

Alvin Toffler's concept of continuing "Future Shock", i.e. change - plus the growing frequency of change, appeared evident for the remainder of the 1970's and into the 1980's. Dr. Z. Zsigmond, Education Division, Statistics Canada, reflected this theme as "waves" of population and enrolment impact engulfing Post-Secondary in the early 1980's. Therefore, it was of paramount importance to have an "early warning system" in operation assessing the changing demands before these "waves" reach our institutions. In this regard, the one year time horizon of PDEM-1 is too short a warning for college and university administrators to react. What was needed was an early warning system monitoring shifting demands three years into the future and beyond.

Additional areas of change and potential post-secondary impact were identified as follows:

1. Recognition of the outcome orientation of current students, i.e. jobs and careers are their primary objectives. The impact of the changing labour markets, shifting economic positions of professional and blue collar groups, and the perceived diminishing "value" of a college or university degree must be watched and monitored by longitudinal market research.
2. Re-orientation of the Secondary School System contains elements which may hide, blur or confuse many decision-makers. For example, multiple electives, continuous progress and grades, and non-grading may disrupt existing class standings and thereby the comparative potentials within and between schools. Differential graduation times and part-time secondary to post-secondary enrolments may not be accommodated in some programs and faculties. The effect of these changes may not only make it more difficult for college and university administrators to determine who is eligible and desires enrolment, but when and how that enrolment is to be established. The decision-making picture is equally blurred and confusing for many students and their parents when they attempt to guess and gauge their performance for post-secondary. Self-selection out of the post-secondary option is no longer so clear and obvious as it once appeared to be.
3. The financial situation of students is another area undergoing change. The current impacts of inflation and increasing tuition must be monitored with care to determine which students and what family backgrounds are most subject to self-selection out of Post-Secondary. Areas of future change involves Federal-Provincial cost-sharing, student loans and the policy surrounding continued parental financial responsibility of eighteen year old voting adults.
4. Educational technology and new modes of delivery are no longer subjects of speculation. They are clearly visible and workable for many students who, by choice or by geographic location, would not otherwise undertake further education. It is expected the traditional institutional offering will be slow to accept these innovations; however, the day of accommodation may not be too distant, perhaps even the early 1980's.

5. The phenomenology of change is a subject we dare not neglect. While a typical pattern is entrenchment, some men and their institutions reject these modes, refuse to wait out the storm, and set about seeking what opportunities may appear. One mode of change is reflected by the independent actor and, like the game of dominoes, these actors and their actions often spill over or overlap to other jurisdictions, producing more change and unpredictability than originally existed. In such situations, comprehensive models with interactive modes and simulation potentials, can be invaluable aids to optimize the system-wide advantages as a counterbalance to rampant opportunism at the individual level.
6. Last, but not least, a window on future demands becomes an invaluable tool for the construction of alternative futures, the simulation of contingency plans, and evaluation of their effectiveness.

In effect, an annual application of this methodology provides the monitoring tool to assess the effectiveness of policies implemented to reduce the pending impacts identified by the early warning system.

Based upon the above listed areas of change and application of a comprehensive demand assessment approach, and the exploration for alternative approaches elsewhere in the world, the Post-Secondary Research Reference Committee recommended that Manitoba undertake the development, implementation and operational status of such a model. Funding was provided in August, 1975. The first three year forecast is expected in Mid-March, 1976 with full operational status scheduled for the summer of 1976.

The full operational potentials are expected to require three years of experience, with the tenth and eleventh grade decision-making process. However, pilot studies suggest this time may be reduced.

A final overview observation in this discussion would compare demand assessment to other forecasting, alternative futures, manpower, contingency-option planning and budgetary approaches. Many of these tools are, in part, if not wholly devoid of involving students, parents and other participants in the planning process. The demand assessment approach represents one of the few tools responsive to the pure demands of student and parents before these expressions are channelled into the existing array of options. It therefore allows decision-makers at all levels the unique opportunity to observe, to test alternative policies, and to adjust when the impacting waves of students and their parents refuse to accept the options which are offered.